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ABSTRACT

This study examined the accuracy of teacher-candidates in conducting an informal oral-reading inventory, in English, of a student whose English exhibited Spanish language features. In one test, subjects recorded, analyzed, and scored an inventory; in a second, they analyzed and scored miscues which were already recorded. Subjects had training and experience in using inventories. The subjects were highly accurate in determining a reader's reading level and in distinguishing between miscues that were Spanish features and those that were not. It was concluded that differences between the language of teacher and student may not be a problem when teachers use informal, objective, individualized diagnostic instruments. (Author/AA)

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ACCURACY IN MEASURING ORAL READING IN ENGLISH BY A STUDENT WITH A SPANISH BACKGROUND

Walter J. Lamberg

The "dialect problem" is of major concern to educators, perhaps especially those of us involved in the training of Reading and English teachers, since our students will be directly involved in and responsible for the language performances of their students. Unhappily, there is no universal agreement on what the "dialect problem" is, let alone on what the potential solutions are. One position takes the view that the problem is more a matter of deficits in teachers than in students--deficits in understanding rather than in language competence (Shuy, 1973). A teacher who lacks a full understanding of what linguistic research has demonstrated about language, dialect, and dialectal differences, may react negatively toward the linguistic performance of students, when those students exhibit differences in their language from the teacher's, and when the students are racially, ethnically, and/or economically different from the teacher. Those differences will be seen as deficiencies, and, at the very least, the teacher will underestimate the student's linguistic performance; at the very worst, underestimate the student's linguistic and intellectual potential.

Such a problem does exist when students with a Spanish-language background have teachers who lack that background (Garcia, 1974). The students may be primarily Spanish-speaking (with English as a second

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language), bilingual (proficient in both and proficient in switching from one to the other), or primarily English-speaking. Research has identified frequently occurring features in the English of persons with a Spanish-language background, which can be described as characteristic of Spanish, or the results of differences between Spanish and English (Lance, 1969; Matluck and Mace, 1973).

Teacher-training can offer two potential solutions--education about language and training in skills in objectively recording and analyzing language. Teacher-candidates in Reading and English are, generally, well-educated; they may not be well-trained. A teacher-candidate may have fourteen years of study in English, perhaps two years of study of another language, at least two courses in the teaching of language-arts, as well as some course work in ethnic studies, linguistics, and,more rarely, dialect. With the increasing emphasis in methods courses on the use of informal, individualized diagnostic instruments (e.g., the informal oral reading inventory), the teacher-candidate will probably have some training.

Direct, sufficient training is another matter. By direct training, I mean the student would work with samples of language, oral readings, by students who exhibit characteristically Spanish features. By sufficient, I mean: (1) establishment of measurable objectives in proficiency in analysis, (2) design of a valid instrument to measure the attainment of the objectives, and (3) effective instruction leading to mastery.

This article reports on one small step in evaluating and initiating improvement in training: needs assessment, as it relates

to training in conducting an informal oral reading inventory (IORI) with a linguistically different student. A limited study was conducted to begin to answer these questions:

1. To what extent are untrained teacher-candidates aware of language differences when conducting an IORI; that is, how accurately will they record characteristically Spanish features as miscues (or departures from a standard reading of the text)?

2. When asked to distinguish between miscues that are Spanish features and those that are not, how accurately will the teacher-candidates identify the Spanish features?

3. When asked to disregard the Spanish features in determining the student's functional reading level (independent, instructional or frustrational), how accurate will the teacher-candidates be?

4. What subjective evaluation will be made of the student's reading? (To phrase the question in a negative way, would the teacher-candidates underestimate the student's ability?)

Other questions that were addressed were:

(1) What effect, if any, was there on the accuracy in conducting the inventory of: (a) course work in linguistics, (b) course work in Spanish, (c) ability to speak Spanish?

(2) What variables seem important enough to be controlled and examined in further research?

Subjects. Ss were 34 students in the Reading Concentration Block, a teacher-training program of The University of Texas at Austin. At the time of the study, Fall Term, 1974, all were enrolled in a six-hour practicum in Reading and a three-hour seminar in Reading. All had completed an introductory methods course in Reading (a three-

hour practicum). The Ss are probably not typical of teacher-candidates in Reading because of the amount of practicum experience.

All Ss had conducted at least one inventory with an elementary student; thirty-one Ss had conducted five or more inventories. Twenty-six had conducted inventories in English with students who had a Spanish-language background. None had conducted an inventory in Spanish. Eighteen had other experiences in analyzing miscues (exercises in methods courses). Sixteen had studied Spanish. Four considered themselves Spanish-speakers. (No attempt was made to specify amount of study in or competence in Spanish. These variables will be more carefully considered in further research.) Twenty had course work in linguistics.

Procedures. Ss took two tests, which consisted of 100-word passages and which combined the common procedures involved in administering and "scoring" an IORI with a procedure recommended by Goodman (1973) for recording and analyzing miscues. Goodman's definition of miscue was used: a miscue is an unexpected response (1973). The definition was amplified as follows:

> Record all miscues, that is, unexpected responses by the reader, or what you would consider departures from a standard reading of the text. Note omissions by circling the word or words omitted. Note insertions and substitutions by writing in the word substituted or inserted. Note variant pronunciations by writing in the pronunciation as you hear it.

Goodman's recommended procedure was followed. First the student recorded all miscues. Then, after the inventory was over, the student identified those that were "shifts to the student's own dialect" (Goodman, 1973,p.10). Accurate recording is difficult enough; if one stops, in the midst of the reading, to try to make judgements about the nature of quality of the miscue, one will not be able to keep up with the reader.

After recording the miscues, S's were asked to do the following: (1) Put a box around those miscues that are characteristic of some speakers of Spanish and English; (2) Count the total number of miscues; (3) Count the number of miscues boxed in; (4) Subtract the number in step #3 from the number in step #2 to get the number of non-characteristic miscues; (5) determine the functional reading level, using the number of non-characteristic miscues.

Ss listened to the tape three times. They made their notations on a response sheet which had the passage being read on the tape.

A second test was then taken, one which focused on the student's ability to identify correctly Spanish features. In this test, students were provided a second passage with the miscues already recorded on it. They went through the same steps as above.

Findings. The performance of the Ss was compared to (for lack of a better term) an "expert's" performance on the two tests. (There is a difficult problem here in deciding what a mastery performance for teacher-candidates should be? Should it be 100% accuracy? 95%? The "expert" after all, had the benefits of years of teaching experience, years of reading and study, the help of colleagues in Reading and Bilingual Education, and a commitment to the project.) To provide for a better control in future research, the "expert performance" will be based on the performance of an individual who is someone other than the person who prepares the tests and who will take the tests under the same conditions as the Ss. It then will be

appropriate to look for statistically significant differences, if any, between the expert's and the Ss scores.

To analyse the data, mean performances in recording total miscues and identifying those that were Spanish features were computed. On Test 1, the mean score for all Ss was 4.76 for total miscues and 3.32 for Spanish features with a 100-word passage. On Test 2, the mean score was 10.29 for total miscues and 8.88 for Spanish features with a 100-word passage. Table 1 provides a breakdown of scores for the different sub-groups (those that studied Spanish, those that did not, etc.)

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Table 1 about here

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A comparison was made between the Ss judgement of the reading ability of the student whose reading was taped with the expert's judgement. On a scale of 1 through 10, with 1 denoting "reads material with great difficulty," and 10 denoting "reads material very well," the expert's evaluation was 9. Of the 34 Ss, 14 agreed with the expert. Twelve gave a rating of 10, one a rating of 8; and one a rating of 6. The mean rating for the different groups was computed and is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2 about here

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A comparison was made between the Ss determination of functional reading level with that of the expert. Of 34 Ss, 30 agreed with the expert on both tests; i.e., determined that both students read at the independent level. On test 1, 4 Ss

identified the level as instructional. On Test 2, 3 Ss identified the level as instructional. No Ss identified the level on either test as frustrational.

Interpretations of Findings. The first question addressed was: To what extent are untrained teacher-candidates aware of language differences when conducting an IORI; that is, how accurately will they record Spanish features as miscues? The findings would suggest that the Ss were not very aware of the Spanish features. Either they did not hear many of them or they heard them but did not regard them as departures from a standard reading of the text. None of the Ss recorded as many as the expert. The mean performance for the whole group was 3.32 out of a possible 12; the highest mean for a sub-group (the four Spanish-speakers) was 6.25. The highest individual performance was 8.

The second question was: When asked to distinguish between miscues that are Spanish features and those that are not, how accurately will the teacher-candidates identify the Spanish features? On Test 2, in which the miscues were already recorded, the Ss tended to be very accurate, both individually and as a group. The mean score for the group was 8.88 (compared to the expert's score of 7.00).

The wide disagreement between the Ss and the expert in recording miscues was, in a sense, cancelled out in the last and most important step in conducting an inventory: the determination of the functional reading level. In this step, the deciding factor is not the total number of miscues or the number of miscues identified as Spanish features, but rather the number of miscues that are not

considered Spanish features.

The third question addressed was: When asked to disregard the Spanish features in determining the student's functional reading level, how accurate will the teacher-candidates be? As a group, the Ss were very accurate. Only four of the 34 disagreed with the expert on Test 1; only three on Test 2. Those who disagreed all missed by one level (instructional rather than frustrational).

The fourth question was: When making an overall evaluation of the student's reading ability, would the teacher-candidates underestimate that ability? The Ss overall evaluation corresponded with their objective measurement of the student's reading. The mean rating was 9.29, which closely agreed with the expert's rating of 9.

Implications for Further Research. The results of the two tests with a limited number of possibly atypical teacher-candidates are more positive and hopeful than negative. The lack of accuracy, in a quantitative sense, in recording Spanish features, must be considered alongside the considerable accuracy in determining the student's functional level and the overall positive and accurate evaluation of the student's reading ability. The apparently negligible effect of study of Spanish and a study of linguistics must be considered alongside the potential major effect of practical experiences in giving inventories generally, and in giving inventories with students who have a Spanish-language background.

Direct mastery-based training in conducting inventories with students who have a Spanish-background may not be necessary, though the effects of such training do seem worth testing. (After looking at the performance of the students who described themselves as Spanish-

speakers, it occurred to me that they may have had the kind of training I was considering; that is, to gain proficiency in Spanish they would have had to have mastered the identification of the differences between Spanish and English).

It may be that the use of an individualized, informal, fairly objective diagnostic instrument like the IORI, in itself, is a major solution to the "dialect problem." It may be that those teachers observed to react negatively to students who are linguistically different are teachers who do not do individualized, informal, objective diagnosis. It would be worthwhile controlling for and comparing the effects of experience in using inventories.

Another factor worth considering in future research is the possible instructional effect of taking the tests used in this study. Students were not simply asked to disregard Spanish features, but rather were provided with procedural steps for disregarding the features in a deliberate and objective manner and were asked to respond in writing to each of those steps. It would be worthwhile to compare the performance of a group following those procedures with a group that conducted an inventory but skipped those steps.

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Table 1

Comparison of Mean Performance in Conducting an Informal Oral Reading Inventory with a Reader Who Exhibits Spanish Features, by Untrained Teacher-Candidates, with an Expert's Performance

		Test 1		Test 2	
	N	Total Miscues	Spanish Features	Total Miscues	Spanish Features
All Ss	34	$\bar{X}$ 4.76	$\bar{X}$ 3.32	$\bar{X}$ 10.29	$\bar{X}$ 8.88
Ss who studied Spanish	16	4.44	3.31	10.00	6.75
Ss who did not study Spanish	18	4.88	3.24	10.53	7.00
Ss who studied linguistics	20	4.95	3.80	10.65	7.30
Ss who did not study linguistics	14	4.57	2.71	9.79	6.29
Ss who were Spanish-Speakers	4	7.00	6.25	10.00	7.00
Expert's Scores		16.00	12.00	11.00	7.00

Table 2

Comparison of Mean Evaluations of The Reading Ability of a Reader Who Exhibits Spanish Features, by Untrained Teacher-Candidates, Using a Scale from 1-10 With 10 Denoting "Reads Material Very Well."

	N	Rating $\bar{X}$
All S	34	9.29
Ss Who Studied Spanish	16	9.13
Ss Who Did Not Study Spanish	18	9.36
Ss Who Studied Linguistics	20	8.50
Ss Who Did Not Study Linguistics	14	6.36
Ss Who Were Spanish-Speakers	4	9.50